

Career Guidance and Counseling Services in Pakistan from the Perspective of Students and Career Services Providers

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Career guidance and counseling (CGC) could be helpful for career related matters of students however, there is a dearth of research evidence about several aspects of CGC services and students' approach towards CGC is one such aspect. This qualitative research was designed to bridge this gap by using triangulation method to explore perspective of students as well as service providers. Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were carried out using a self-devised interview protocol. Convenient sampling strategy was used to conduct eighteen interviews with university students ($n = 10$ men, $n = 8$ women) with age ranging from 17-23 years and seven interviews with career service providers ($n = 3$ men, $n = 4$ women) working at the university level. Thematic analysis revealed two major themes, eight macro themes and thirteen micro themes. Findings of the study revealed that CGC was perceived to be valuable, multidimensional, and necessary for students at all stages. However, students' approach to CGC was predominated by cultural and circumstantial influences. Students' awareness was limited and their academic choices were misaligned with their personal interests. Students' decisions were enforced or poorly made and they were largely engaged in procrastination. Expectations of students were not congruent with reality, moreover, their theoretical knowledge was detached from practice. Results were discussed and future research directions were highlighted. Research implications pinpoint that appropriate provision, awareness, access, and utilization of CGC could be beneficial for many students and their career issues.

Keyword. Career guidance, career counseling, perception, behaviour

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Career counseling has been defined diversely by social scientists. Swanson (1995) defined it as a face-to-face process having a clear focus on career-related concerns while Guerriero and Allen (1998) remark that the process of career counseling addresses the career needs of clients. Zunker (2012) opines that career counseling helps promote agency by making career-related choices at any point in life. During this process, multiple factors like family, work and leisure are considered. It can further focus on developing skills, increasing adjustment, decreasing stress and managing mental health issues.

Career guidance appears to be an umbrella term that can include multiple ways to provide career-related help and support to individuals. It has been defined by Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as “services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training, and occupational choices and to manage their career... the activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and maybe face-to-face or at a distance” (OECD, 2004, p. 10). These definitions imply that career counseling and career guidance are inherently helpful activities aimed at career needs. Owing to the similarity in these terms, they are often used collectively or interchangeably (Sultana, 2004; US Department for Education, 2014). Hence, for this research, we use the term career guidance and counseling (CGC).

CGC is an essential part of universities in many countries around the world. It has been established well at some institutions in Pakistan and recently, many universities and even schools in Pakistan have started establishing Career guidance and counseling service centers as well. Internationally, many countries have policies and rules regarding CGC and CGC services and are being offered to students accordingly (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, n.d.; National Careers Service, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Countries including France, Germany, UK, Greece, Italy, Austria, Norway and Finland are continuously working to enhance their CGC services (Sultana, 2004). Many world-renowned universities (e.g., Stanford University, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Oxford) have specifically designed career centers for helping students with career-related matters. Diverse services are available for students including one-to-one sessions, group sessions, job fairs, career seminars, career assessments, career workshops, internship opportunities, job opportunities, job hunting, C.V. writing and industry-academia linkages (Yoon, Hutchison, Maze, Pritchard, & Reiss, 2018). International students“ avail CGC from an early age (Cahill & Furey, 2017; Maree, 2018) and benefit from it in numerous

ways including increased educational achievement, increased satisfaction and purposefulness (Hiebert, Borgan, & Schober, 2010), improved wellbeing (Robertson, 2013), better career adaptability (Cahill & Furey, 2017; Maree, 2018), decreased career decision difficulties (Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2009).

In Pakistan, CGC is spreading with time but relevant policies and research are scarce (Richard, 2005; Zahid, Hooley, & Neary, 2020). Some organizations in Pakistan like Afaq, Eduvision, Counseling, and Edvisehub and many other have appeared in the recent past which offer CGC services (Zahid et al., 2020) either online or face-to-face. Their face-to-face services are mostly concentrated in the major cities of Pakistan like Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Rawalpindi etc. Some educational institutions particularly universities have developed special career centers for their students including the National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (formerly known as FAST), Forman Christian College University, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Bahria University, National University of Sciences and Technology, University of Engineering and Technology, University of Agriculture. Within past five years, the government of the largest province, Punjab, has started offering incentives to educational institutions for arranging career events like a job fairs, workshops, and seminars (Punjab Higher Education Commission, 2015). This shows growth in the provision of CGC services.

If availed properly, CGC could be beneficial for Pakistani students; however, local research has shown that university career offices had low utility for students (Bilal & Malik, 2014). Instead of CGC, multitude of factors might be influencing the career-related decisions of Pakistani students (Zubair, 2012) like high-paying jobs (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Sharif, Ahmad, & Sarwar, 2019), parental involvement particularly father's influence (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Sharif et al., 2019), conditional family support, lack of information about careers (Javed & Tariq, 2016; Zubair, 2012) and self-esteem (Javed & Tariq, 2016). This establishes that CGC services have a wide variety and can be beneficial but indigenous information about the approach towards CGC is limited.

Rationale

CGC is an emerging field in Pakistan (Richard, 2005; Zahid et al., 2020). It is continually growing as universities and private organizations are trying to offer these services to students. However, CGC practices are not evaluated by any governmental body or association as no national policy or government-level supervision is in place in Pakistan so far (Zahid et al., 2020). Hence, indigenous CGC

provision, though expanding, is not free from skepticism. To the best of our knowledge, there is no research exploring the perspective of Pakistan-based career service providers (CSPs) and students about CGC. Hence, it is not certain that indigenous CSPs are aware of the depth and breadth of the concept of CGC given that many CSPs do not hold relevant educational qualification (It is clear from our sample where only 3 out of 7 CSPs had the relevant qualification). Perspectives of university students, who are the primary target audience for university based CGC centers, have not been explored indigenously. University students usually base their career-related matters on multiple personal factors instead of professional career help. Career services and CSPs are not a part of many schools and colleges hence, many university students have their first exposure to CGC at the university level (Zahid et al., 2020). Therefore, there is lack of information regarding their awareness and perceptions of such services.

Moreover, as youth constitutes a sizeable portion of the Pakistani population that is, 29% of the population consists of 15-29 years old (UNDP, 2017). Engaging this chunk of youth in meaningful and productive careers through CGC would have immense potential benefits. CGC has bright prospects for Pakistani students (Kavale, 2012; Richard, 2005) but unprofessional and varied practices of CGC services might do more harm than good. It is also unclear how people are responding to the recent surge of CGC in Pakistan. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the approach towards CGC from two viewpoints i.e. students and their career service providers (CSPs). Indigenous research regarding this topic is not available; hence, in-depth qualitative study would help in bringing out the necessary details. Triangulation i.e. gathering data from different sources would help in maximizing the data and strengthening the obtained information. The approach of students towards CGC services can be explored which will help to develop an insight into how students perceive CGC; how they interact with the service providers and how they consume the offered CGC services. It will help to identify any problematic behaviors and strengthen positive behaviors and attitudes towards CGC services.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are given as under:

1. To explore understanding of students and career service providers about CGC.
2. To explore about the utilization of available CGC from students and career service providers perspective.

3. To find out the ways used for addressing career-related concerns by students and career service providers.

Method

This is qualitative exploratory research that focuses on the in-depth investigation of proposed research questions through semi-structured interviews. Exploratory research gives free reign to look at a topic in detail that has not been studied extensively (Stebbins, 2001).

Sample

The sample consisted of undergraduate students ($N = 18$) including ten men and eight women with an age ranging from 17 to 23 years; and CSPs ($N = 7$) including three men and four women. The sample was gathered from different universities in Islamabad and Lahore by using a convenient sampling strategy. All the included universities had CGC services and CSPs for their undergraduate students.

They belonged to 4-years Bachelors programs from various faculties including social sciences, business studies, sciences, engineering, and commerce. Foreign students or students with disabilities were excluded as their career-related concerns might be very different from the career-related concerns of other students.

Sample of CSPs consisted of those individuals who were responsible for providing career-related help to the students of their university. Their job titles were wide-ranging like career counselor, manager placements, officer student affairs, lecturer, and manager career service office. Despite the variety of their job descriptions, they offered career-related services including career guidance, industry liaisons, career seminars, and placements to varying extents. In our sample, only 3 CSPs had relevant qualifications (MS or diploma in Career Counseling) whereas the remaining CSPs had Masters in Business or Psychology. The seven CSPs included three males and four females. No exclusion criterion was considered for the sample of CSPs.

Instrument

The interview protocol consisted of five open-ended semi-structured questions along with a few probes. Initially, the interview protocol was prepared by the authors in light of previous literature, personal experiences and cultural context. It was carefully checked to

avoid repetitions. It was then sent to a university-level instructor and a university-level career counselor for their feedback. After receiving their positive feedback interview protocol was finalized. Same interview protocol was used to conduct interviews with students and CSPs (Annex-A).

Procedure

Twenty five face-to-face interviews were conducted with students and CSPs by visiting different universities in Islamabad and Lahore. University career offices were emailed before the visit and convenient times were set up with CSPs. Before initiating each interview, the purpose and ethical protocols of the study were communicated and discussed with the interviewee by using a written informed consent form including voluntary participation, the value of authentic answers, audio recording, the anonymity of data and right to withdrawal. All participants signed the informed consent form before starting the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and carefully stored with anonymous codes. To keep confidentiality of participants, students are referred to as S.1, S.2 and professionals are referred to P.1, P.2 and so on in the analysis section.

Results

Interviews were transcribed by listening to the recordings. Then interview data was analyzed by thematic analysis to show rich descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were generated using bottom-up approach as there was no pre-existing coding framework to follow. A semantic approach was followed as we focused on the apparent meaning of data (Braun, Clarke, & Rance, 2014).

Using steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), authors familiarized themselves with the data by writing all data verbatim and re-reading it to get acquainted with it. In the second step, codes were generated by reading the verbatim and noting possible codes on the page margins. Then relevant data was combined under the same code. In the third step, authors read through the codes and the data gathered under each code. Possible themes were proposed based on the codes. In fourth step, authors reviewed all the themes and the possible interlinks between themes. It was checked if any themes could be considered as sub-themes or if two themes could be merged. Interlinking but distinct themes were connected and bigger picture was understood. Fifth step consisted of polishing the themes continuously by looking at themes, subthemes and the verbatim under them. In the sixth and last step of thematic analysis, the procedure was written down.

Table 1

Process of Thematic Analysis Based on Braun and Clarke (2006)

Phase	Task	It was done by...
1	Data familiarization	Writing all data verbatim and re-reading it
2	Code generation	Writing possible codes on page margins and then combining relevant data under their codes
3	Searching themes	Reviewing data and devising themes based on data codes
4	Reviewing themes	Analyzing themes along with their data and devising thematic tables and figures to understand interlinks
5	Defining and naming themes	Repeatedly polishing themes and finding appropriate names for them
6	Producing report	Writing thematic analysis process and including relevant data verbatim

To ensure credibility (validity) and dependability (reliability), various steps proposed by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2014) were taken. First, the whole research process was made simple to understand. Second, triangulation was used as interview data was gathered from two groups of respondents including students and CSPs instead of relying on a single data source. Third, the authors noted down potential biases and assumptions before data analysis to maintain objectivity (Guest et al., 2014). To be cautious in our analysis, it was ensured that themes were not based on interview questions but naturally arose from the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These steps led us to our results which are detailed in the next section.

Two major themes, eight macro themes and thirteen micro-themes emerged after thematic analysis of the data. Their explanation and supporting verbatim is included in the results.

Perception about CGC

This was the first major theme containing three subthemes. Ideas and concepts about CGC and its importance are included in this theme.

Understanding of the concept of CGC.

Definitions. Findings show that the students and CSPs both perceived CGC accurately as described in the literature. Respondents used the terms career counseling and career guidance interchangeably. Some respondents highlighted that career guidance is broader term while, career counseling is relevant only to career-related issues. Following verbatim emphasize this.

Table 2

Major, Macro and Micro Level Themes From Interview Data

Major themes	Macro level themes	Micro level themes
Perception about CGC	Concept of CGC Importance and benefits Provision at multiple stages	Definition of CGC Multidimensional nature
Scenario of Education and CGC	Awareness Academics Decision making Behavior Disconcerted elements	Inadequate self-awareness Confused students Limited opportunity awareness Mismatched academics Academic disinterest Enforced and poor decisions Procrastination Impact of exposure and experience Proactivity Discrepancy in expectations and reality Disconnect and theory and practice

“Counseling is something which I consider to be a part of guidance. (If I have) an issue or problem or I am stuck somewhere then counseling helps me in that” (S.2).

“Career guidance is a general umbrella term which can include one-to-one counseling, group counseling, advice giving etc. Career counseling is more specific in which you facilitate students who approach you with their problems or issues” (P.3).

Multidimensional nature. CGC is multidimensional in nature by study participants. Various elements are reported to be a part of CGC, for example, general awareness about self including skills, strengths, weaknesses, interests; information regarding attitude, aptitude, and job market opportunities; subject choice, potential careers and future planning; scholarships; testing and assessment, general and personalized guidance etc.

“CGC can be about (your) career or even about your personal life... (CGC means) which type of jobs will be available (to us) in the future, where jobs are available and which companies provide jobs as per students’ aptitude” (S.3).

“Career counseling is like facilitating students by helping them, counseling them in terms of their interests, in terms of subject choice, in terms of guidance regarding scholarships, in terms of making them aware of job prospects of their field, in terms of switching their field if they want to” (P.6).

CSPs also emphasize that each student should be considered as a whole and multiple aspects should be considered at once for provision of appropriate CGC services. Divulging partial information and focusing on a single dimension is not very helpful.

“It (CGC) is a three pronged approach that you need to connect your social, personal and economic development and connect them all to your leading (career) goals and targets” (P. 5).

“We have to look into the individuals, the individual psyche and how they want to proceed in their life. Only then you can start advising them on career path” (P. 2).

Overall, there is sound understanding about CGC and its activities.

Importance and benefits. Value and advantage of CGC was well-appreciated by interviewees. According to them, CGC helps by making career-related matters easier for students. It saves their time and energy by providing required information and direction. It aligns future planning and decision making. Consequently, it relieves stress and helps in gaining mental peace.

“On a scale of 1 to 10, it is important at 12” (S. 14).

“They (students) need to talk to someone who can understand them, guide them, tell them about opportunities, guide them about colleges and test procedures. There are so many things which we neglect. Mentally, you feel a lot of benefit from it (CGC)”(S. 8).

“The students (after career counseling) would be empowered and not indecisive” (P. 3).

Benefits of CGC also spread from individual level to the larger societal level. Satisfaction with their careers would likely lead students towards personal satisfaction, meaningful actions, and economic empowerment.

“The more we address the career issue, the better their mental health will be. And the problems in society like terrorism, insecurity etc. will be controlled if students’ career planning is done at the right time and their career issues are addressed then it can help the society at large” (P. 4).

“(As a result of CGC) they will not only be a student but they will be able to add to the economy” (P. 3).

In short, CGC was considered highly advantageous by students as well as CSPs.

Provision at Multiple Stages. This subtheme mainly emerged from the interviews of CSPs. CGC is vital at each and every step of a student’s life. It should not be limited to school, college, university, or professional life, but should encompass all these and beyond as well. CGC can arise as a major need at any point in time. Therefore, it should be offered at multiple steps and stages.

“It is very important and not just at undergraduate level, I think in every single level, even in job, organizations, companies, even the most primary level of schools or education” (S. 2).

However, students may not utilize these services at school level as they are mostly focused on securing high grades instead of exploring their potential and the career related possibilities.

“They say that you should offer counseling at FSc level (Grade 12)... I do not think that student’s mental level maturity is up to the mark where I see a lot of struggle and a lot of question marks on the faces of the students whose sole aim is to get good marks to get into a good university. So career counseling in our country, in my opinion, is completely useless when it comes to that (grade 12) level but at university level they start to understand the responsibility” (P. 5).

Scenario of Education and CGC

This is the second major theme from data. It contains many subthemes highlighting students’ awareness in general and their CGC in particular. Subthemes are explained and supportive verbatim is included to make them comprehensible.

Awareness.

Inadequate self-awareness. Findings showed that most students lacked a sound understanding of their own selves. Many of them did not have the idea about what areas they should use for their benefit and what areas they need to improve upon. Usually, their personal self is an untapped domain altogether.

“We are not self-aware as we never fully tried to know our selves. (Most of the time we are) solely focused on studies” (S. 9).

“They have no idea of their skills” (P. 3).

However, some CSPs considered that students have varied levels of self-awareness. Some of them do have an idea of their strengths and weaknesses.

“Students are pretty much aware of their skills and they know the deficit areas also” (P. 2).

Confused students. Many undergraduates face number of confusions and conundrums regarding the choice of subject, area of specialization, advanced degree, job opportunities, and job market. Students are not clear what they want their career to be, what they want to achieve and where they want to go.

“Now-a-days, the main problem is that students are confused about their career goals, about their future, their future goals, what they want in life, where they want to go. There are difficulties while making career choices because there is no clarity. There is no clarity and that is the problem of today’s youth. They don’t know what they want and what they will do (about it)” (P. 7).

Limited opportunity awareness. Undergraduates often possess limited information and awareness about the opportunities present around them. Resultantly, they hardly benefit from them. Many respondents were unaware of the CSPs and the CGC services in their universities. Those who do know about it seldom attended the CGC-related events as they fail to realize its importance. Students refrain from participating in CGC events as they prefer to maintain their attendance in compulsory courses; they are not interested in the topics addressed by CSPs, they don’t want to encounter administrative staff; there is no trend in students to avail CGC, they fear being stigmatized. Hence, CGC appeared to be poorly utilized by undergraduates.

“I don’t think that our university offers CGC services” (S. 7).

“They (CGC events) are very boring” (S. 17).

“No matter how useful your (career related) session is but if students are not in the mood to listen, if they are not interested then they will pay no heed to it” (S. 12).

“We don’t have the time because if we attend the (career counseling) seminars then we miss out on our (required class) attendance. So we prefer to save our semester and get our attendance marked in lectures instead of attending (career counseling) seminars” (S. 17).

“No one goes there (to the CGC office). Actually, in university we avoid the administration (and they are involved in booking CGC appointments)... So we try to stay as far away from them as much as possible” (S. 17).

“Students normally don’t go (for career counseling) because there is no trend. From my batch, I don’t know a single person who went to career counselor” (S. 3).

“There are a lot of people who think that (if they go for career counseling) they will be labeled as impaired or malfunctioning or disabled” (S. 2).

Similarly, many students don’t recognize the internship opportunities and their potential benefits. Internships are a part of academia which provides students a taste of industry. Students lack information about the right place for internship; they are simply not bothered about it; they miscalculate its value; they consider it a mere requirement of their degrees instead of a practical opportunity. Consequently, they fail to benefit from them.

“Many companies approach our university and offer internships to students, but students don’t join them because they think they should complete their studies first” (S. 2).

“I had no idea how many internships I needed for (fulfilling the criteria of) graduation. One internship was the requirement of the degree, but the thing is that when I went to the industry, I realized that even a 2 week long internship will teach me something which I will utilize in future” (S. 3).

Decision making.

Enforced and poor decisions. Student participants reported often experiencing the negative consequences of wrong decisions about their academics or career. Students reported making poor decisions by themselves or they are subjected to such decisions under external pressures including decisions made by parents or other members of family. Consequences of such decisions are vast and dire e.g., failure, regret, self-criticism, damage to the whole life, sense of being trapped in a degree, sense of dragging the degree, troubles in finding the right jobs, feeling forced into or trapped by their jobs, psychological troubles i.e., anxiety, depression, stress, mood swings, unhappiness, and an overall dull life etc.

“(If) you don’t let the person do whatever they want then (obviously) they will fail...If they don’t fail they become below average and they keep on criticizing themselves...sometimes even I cry myself to sleep (as I was forced to take up this degree). I just don’t know what is happening with me...that is I am not doing what I really want to do” (S. 2).

“(Speaking from a student’s perspective) we have confusions because we are not studying as per our interests. When you don’t

study as per your interests, then you don't want to do the job as well because the job you get is as per the studies you have completed. So, some people have to struggle a lot. This builds up anxiety and depression. Actually, you are told to do something which you don't want to do, and your career consumes 80 to 90 % of your time in a day. So, imagine if I am doing something which I don't like, (it means) my life is finished. Career makes the life go forth. So if that is not sorted everything else will not be sorted. They will end up doing things that they don't want to do. Look! That (wrong career decision) causes all the issues in life. Anxiety is due to that, stress is due to that, mood swings are due to that, diseases are due to that" (P. 7).

Academics.

Mismatched academics. Many undergraduates face discrepancies in their educational degree, skills, attributes, interests and traits. This results in a mismatch of education with their selves and other aspects of their lives. This can be a possible result of enforced and poor decisions.

"The skills they have and the (educational) field they have opted for, are completely different" (S. 14).

"In 4th or 5th semester, you get to know that you are on the wrong side and this is not your field. This is not your future, not your passion. You are better in other skills" (S. 1).

Academic disinterest. Many students are not interested in their academics as they follow university education for inappropriate reasons. In addition to the mismatched academics discussed above, students pursue degrees to show them off, to get a prestigious title associated with the degree, just for the sake of possessing a degree or for fulfilling their parent's wish. Academic disinterest affects their understanding and motivation hence, many students are unable to perform well.

"Everyone in this education system is racing... they want a degree to show the world and their family that they achieved something" (S. 5).

"Label of an „engineer“ or a „doctor“ should be assigned" (S. 8).

"They don't know why they are doing their degree because they don't know what their interests are. They just think that they are not getting admission elsewhere, they don't know (much) about any other field (so they enroll where they get admission)... So there are many students who are doing it just to get a degree" (P. 3).

“Most of the students who face difficulties in their studies are actually having issues because they are not interested in their studies. And when you are not interested, you (definitely) don’t want to study, and you don’t understand, no matter how hard you try to...We have very wrong reasons. As individuals we don’t focus on learning. We don’t study to learn, we don’t study to gain knowledge; we study to get a degree” (P. 7).

Behavior.

Procrastination. There is a prevailing style of delaying everything till the eleventh hour among university students. They don’t usually pay heed to the available CGC until the last minute. Often they realize very late in the process about the tasks they need to do and the actions they need to take for their careers.

“We as students are procrastinators, (in initial semester we think) there are 2-3 more years, we will think about it (CGC) and avail it (later)” (S. 10).

“The majority of people I have observed, including myself, do nothing (regarding career counseling)” (S. 5).

Impact of exposure and experience. As undergraduates pass through their degree their knowledge develops further. They establish deeper comprehension of their interests, abilities, and personality. Enhanced exposure consequently leads to greater understanding of their selves and the opportunities around them. Contrary to junior-year students, senior-year students are usually active, serious and concerned about their future. They realize their CGC needs and they try to access CGC services to fulfill them. They try to develop their skills, get job market information, find out job opportunities and figure out alternative possibilities.

“Initially when students are young they are busy in their frolicking for 2 to 3 years. But after that when the reality hits then they realize that they need to know about it and then they think about it and work for it as well” (P.7).

“Towards the end of our degree, we know we HAVE to do it or it is going to be too late” (S. 3).

“In the final semesters students think whether they want to go for job or not after completing graduation. So they collect more information. They try to know what is happening in (job) market” (S. 14).

“Any skills which we lack in, we try to find (about them) from internet or any other helpful sources” (S. 15).

“(After realizing CGC needs) they always schedule focus group discussion and one on one career coaching. They bring in their resumes and they start doing mock interviews, they also aggressively start going after placement office, and some of the student also start visiting counseling center” (P. 5).

Proactively. Over the period of time, students realize the importance of personal effort for their career development. They understand that they need to be proactive to get information, to develop and groom for industry and to reach out to CGC services. Nothing would be offered to them on a gold platter by their institution or by the industry.

“You have to make a little effort. Information is available. If people want it, if they go after it properly, they can (surely) seek it out” (S. 17).

“Out of a batch of 100 people only 2 or 3 people (will) fulfill the specific criteria of industry... (just) because those 2 or 3 are the people who made an effort themselves to know about the industry or to enhance their skills” (S. 3).

Proactively is usually underlined by interest of students. If something interests them, they will be very active and efficient about it. If their interest does not match with an activity or task, they will not be bothered about it.

“Even when a student knows that a person relevant to their field is delivering a session or a workshop they still don’t bother. They will be wandering here and there saying “when I am not interested in it then that’s it (I will not attend it)” (P. 1).

Interested students would show proactive behaviors regarding their academics and careers. They would work for it; they would actively gather information about job market; they would focus on their self-improvement; they would avail the offered CGC services. But lack of interest would lead to lazy and negligent behaviors on behalf of students.

Disconcerted elements.

Discrepancy in expectations and reality. Expectation of students about the job market and the actual scenarios of job market differ a lot. Students harbor faulty perceptions about the world of work specifically regarding work experience and monetary compensation.

Some students believe that work experience could only be gained after being hired by the organization. A respondent stated, “You only gain experience when you enter a company and start a job there”

(Student) whereas internships, placements or other practical works undertaken during graduation can count in the relevant work experience.

Similarly, students often perceive higher pay than the job market offers.

“When students are studying in universities and spending 10 to 12 lac (rupees as fee per semester) their expectation level is very high. We think that when we graduate, we will get jobs paying 60 to 70 thousand PKR per month. But actually, in market the trends are not like this and owing to tough competitions such expectations are not met” (10.S).

Moreover, students lack practical skills required in the job market. Students are often unaware of the industrial requirements. This creates challenges for them when they have to move from undergrad degree to world of work.

“Unfortunately, due to the limitation and confusion and misleading attributions in students’ head with respect to their degree and the demand of the industry, the student is somewhere in between, and they are not transitioning to the industry...If we talk about this transition of students, industry part is very active and students are unaware what skills are required and when they have to apply” (P. 4).

Sometimes the academic degrees of students are ill-fitting to the available jobs. This discrepancy springs from lack of understanding of the job market.

“The students who graduate are not getting paid according to qualifications. They are opting for seats they are overqualified for; or they are opting for seats which are not appropriate for them to be sitting on” (P. 5).

Disconnect in theory and practice. This subtheme only emerged from the interviews of CSPs. Usually; universities are focused on imparting knowledge by teaching theory. Practical learning and skill development is not primarily included in it. Hence, the graduating students rarely possess practical skills required in the market. Their degrees or high grades might be of no use for the employer.

“I am very sorry to say that in our universities, though I am also working in an educational institute, our focus is only on the degrees and the marks. But what will they (the students) do with marks if they don’t know practical application and implication of it (their degree)” (P. 3).

Discussion

The two major themes along with their macro and micro themes are discussed one by one. A first major theme is a perception about CGC. Students and CSPs both have unambiguous concepts of CGC. They rightly pointed out different aspects of CGC like self-awareness, information of degrees and jobs, scholarship opportunities, internships, decision making, future planning while considering various factors like self, society and economic scenario of students. Some respondents also highlighted the slight difference in career guidance and career counseling indicating conceptual clarity regarding CGC.

This implies that CSPs working in universities have a sound comprehension of CGC. Many CSPs in our sample had no formal CGC education or training. Even then their concepts are not far-fetched from definitions by Swanson (1995), Guerriero and Allen (1998), Zunker (2012) and OECD (2004) given in the introductory portion of this article. Their awareness regarding CGC and their experience with students might be key elements behind their conceptual clarity.

Respondents believed in the value and importance of CGC. CGC was considered to be useful for all levels including schools, colleges, universities and post-university as well. Though all students are not equally mature and hence all might not benefit from CGC. Nevertheless, CGC is extremely necessary as it could help individuals in resolving their issues, deciding their pathways, utilizing their potentials, realizing their dreams, becoming functional members of society and contributing to the economy. Hence, the benefits of CGC could spread from individuals to the larger society up to the whole nation.

Research also shows support for the extensive benefits of CGC. Young students could benefit from CGC (Cahill & Furey, 2017). At the individual level, CGC could improve career decision making (Masdonati et al., 2009), career adaptability (Cahill & Furey, 2017; Maree, 2018), well-being (Robertson, 2013), satisfaction, purposefulness and educational achievement (Hiebert et al., 2010). At the societal level, CGC could help in improved social bonding and better economic output (Hooley & Dodd, 2015).

The second major theme identified from the interview responses is the scenario of education and CGC. This theme corresponds to the overall picture of education and CGC of university students in Pakistan. It has five macro themes: Awareness, academics, decision

making, behaviour and disconcerted elements. These indicate five broad domains which shape the educational journey of students and impact their approach to CGC. These have been addressed in detail as follows.

Awareness of students is generally insufficient. Students hardly know about their skills and attributes. Many students are naïve to their abilities and ignorant of their interests. Lack of awareness and clarity encompasses other spheres as well. Students are not clear about the goal they should achieve and the path they should follow. Many are confused about their subjects and their degree. Research shows that flailing awareness leads to other issues like unsure of academic interests (Watkin, 2016), unsure of personal potential (Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006), time lost in hit and trial, blind following of advice (Hofstede, 2001) and issues in career success (Guber, 2015).

Information and awareness about available opportunities are also very little. Either students are not aware of the facilities, or they don't know the best way to utilize them. Many students were not aware of the internship opportunities available for them. They were misinformed about the required internships and their benefits (Richard, 2005). Instead, they should be made aware of the means to acquire internships very early on like how to seek internships, how to contact the industry, what are the potential benefits of extra internships (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017). Similarly, some students were not benefitting from CGC as they were unaware of the CGC services available on campus while others were not interested in CGC seminars. Some students simply refrained from attending CGC events as they considered it taboo (Watts & Fretwell, 2004) while others did not attend because they noticed other students doing the same. This bandwagon effect hampers their career development (Secchi & Gullekson, 2016).

To improve this scenario, CSPs should rigorously communicate their services to students through advertisements, posters, email updates of upcoming CGC events and introduction of CGC services at the beginning of the degree program preferably on orientation day (Long & Hubble, 2017). Moreover, CSPs could offer online participation in CGC seminars, or they could make the recordings and relevant presentations available online to the students of their university. In this way, students could listen to them anytime without missing out on their scheduled classes (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). CGC events specifically designed for students of a degree program could be designed and planned in collaboration with relevant teachers. This could be a way to incorporate teachers' input and feedback regarding students' common concerns or career needs as CGC should be aligned

with the need of students (Kavale, 2012). Additionally, variety in CGC events like adding practical activities to the typical lecture-based style seminars could help grab and sustain students' attention and involvement in CGC activities. Compulsory attendance in CGC events could motivate students to attend them. However, it might fail to create interest rather than lead to disinterest and resistance in participation. Another way to enhance the approachability of CGC is to assure confidential CGC sessions provided by a CSP who is not linked with the academic departments (American Counseling Association, 2014). This will guarantee the students that their secrets will not travel back to their teachers and their grievances will not turn around to bite them in the back.

Decision making is another macro theme. Decisions made at the university level are important as they might hold life-long influence (Richard, 2005). Decisions should be made after in-depth and critical thinking (Szilagy, 2008). But decisions of Pakistani students are usually made poorly. Some students don't get to exercise their choice in decision making. In many cases, students are forced to follow the decisions of elders (Hofstede, 2001; Zahid et al., 2020) who are often fulfilling their wishes and incompetence through their children. Some students make decisions by blindly following the example of those who succeeded in a particular career. They fail to understand their differences (Watts & Fretwell, 2004). Lack of information and inadequate self-awareness also lead to an insufficient basis for making the right decisions (Richard, 2005). Further, students might opt for those degrees which are perceived to have high demand in the job market or which are perceived as high paying and prestigious (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Sharif et al., 2019). Some careers might not be considered suitable due to religious or cultural boundaries. Such personal, economic, societal and religious factors impact career decision making. Poor decisions might have extensive effects on students while appropriate decisions could open up many avenues (Arslan & Kılınc, 2019; Hofstede, 2001). As consequence of poor decisions students might be disinterested in studies; they might keep on dragging or fail altogether; they might regret the decision and feel trapped by it; they might face difficulties in job search (Shimoni, Gutentag & Gati, 2019). Despite issues in decision making students often fail to reach out to CSPs and utilize CGC.

The next macro theme is academics. The academic mismatch is common in many cases. Students are not sure which academic pathway they want to pursue (Richard, 2005). Often they start pursuing their degree because they could not get admission to any other academic program. Many times their academic paths are not

aligned with their interests and abilities. The academic mismatch might lead the student to academic disinterest. They are often pursuing a degree without any interest in it. They don't find their degree stimulating or informative. They don't want to continue it but they keep at it to earn their degree. They are less likely to pursue a long term career aligned with their academic degree. They might shift their pathway altogether.

Academic mismatch and disinterest could lead to career-related issues and mental health issues (Santos, Wang & Lewis, 2018). Timely CGC services could avert these dire consequences. Improved self-awareness could also help students to avoid academic mismatching (Hooley, 2014). Further, options to switch to other fields or other areas of specializations could benefit those students who were previously uncertain. All these could be achieved by utilizing CGC (Grote, 2015; Vertsberger & Gati, 2015).

Another macro theme is behavior. The behavior of students indicates their approach to CGC. Generally, students are procrastinators. Most of them are habitual of putting off required tasks till the last moment and meeting the deadline in the nick of time. The general attitude of procrastination means that students miss out on all those opportunities which require persistence, perseverance and intrinsic motivation. This procrastination seeps into their approach to CGC as well. Many students go to career offices just before graduation. Though some issues could be managed at the last minute the extensive processes of exploring job market options, preparing a strong resume by gaining a variety of experiences, exposing own self to various market professionals, supplementing education with the right skills and experiences is usually not possible just before graduation.

If students get the right exposure and experience in terms of internships, market visits, sessions with market professionals and the likes (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017) then their behavior generally improves. Procrastination might be stopped in its tracks and proactivity might take its place. When students realize their incompetence in terms of job readiness and their deficiency in terms of employers' demands then they try to fulfil these gaps. They become efficient and interested in CGC; they approach CSPs; they follow their guidelines; they put in the extra effort. Research also supports that such proactive behavior regarding CGC could be beneficial for their career development (Hooley, 2014) though it is not a common sight.

To bring improvement in behavior, students should be made to realize the situation of the job market, future directions in their degree,

requirements of employers and ways to fulfil them. Sessions with industrial experts, visits to workplaces and collaborative projects with industries could be some ways to help with this situation (Rehill, Kashedpakdel & Mann, 2017). The Sooner this realization sets in; the greater will be the chances of improvement in their procrastinating behavior.

Disconcerted elements represent the last macro theme. Misalignment in different factors leads to discrepancies. These, in turn, affect the scenario of education and the scenario of CGC. The discrepancy in expectations of students and the reality of the job market is a common occurrence. When students are not given appropriate exposure to the relevant job market, they fail to recognize its reality. Students often have unrealistic notions regarding the kind of work, working environment, work responsibilities and remuneration. Many students don't have a clear idea about market requirements. A common consideration is that companies will hire people solely based on their degrees without giving any value to skills and experience. When students get to face the reality such misconceptions are broken down. But it could be too late for many students as they might have missed many opportunities by then. Similarly, disconnect in theoretical and practical aspects of education might be damaging for many students. Many students understand theoretical concepts but lack the practical considerations for the same probably owing to the deficient curriculum (Wang, 2012). They might know the information, but they might be unable to apply it in a real-world situation. Such disconnect in theory and practice highlights the need for bridging academia and industry. It also strengthens the value of internships as they are a chance to translate theory to practice (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017; Hooley, 2014). CGC could help students to identify and cover the gaps in their practice.

Hence, the approach of students towards CGC is precarious. Improvement in their approach could lead to improvement in their awareness, academics, decision making and behaviors. Interconnection between micro-level themes.

In the light of results and discussion, we propose interconnections between various micro-level themes. Enforced and poor decisions might lead students to make such academic choices that are mismatched with their interests and abilities (b to c). Inadequate self-awareness also feeds academic mismatch (a to c). Academic mismatch causes academic disinterest (c to d). When students are not interested in their academic pursuits, they are confused and unsure (d to e).

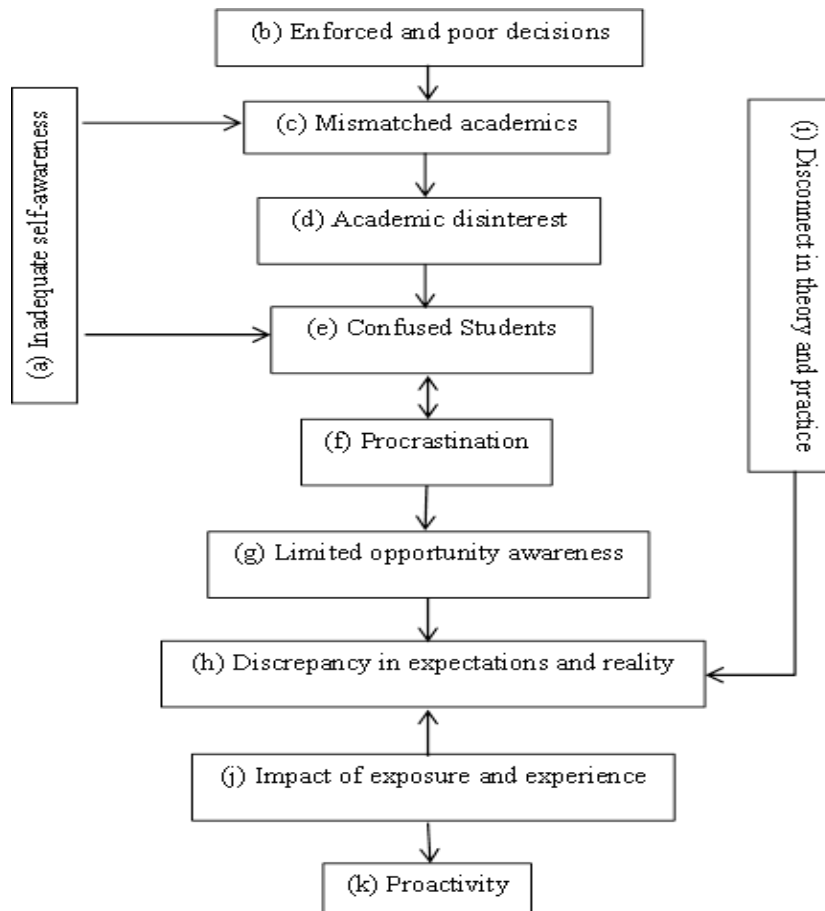


Figure 1. Proposed interconnection between micro-level themes.

Their inadequate self-awareness adds to their confusion (a to e). Procrastination could further add to their confusion (f to e). When they delay their tasks they fail to increase their knowledge and awareness consequently increasing their confusion. At the same time confusion might lead them to procrastinate (e to f). When students are unsure, they don't know which tasks to pursue. Hence confused students might procrastinate or procrastinators might stay confused. Procrastination also leads to limited opportunity awareness (f to g). When students put off work till the eleventh hour, they miss out on several opportunities. The discrepancy in expectation versus reality is caused by limited opportunity awareness and discrepancy in theory and practice (g to h and i to h). Students are unaware of many opportunities and their awareness is tunnel-visioned by a few career opportunities only, then they don't have a sound understanding of the vast opportunities available in reality. Additionally, students gain

theoretical knowledge during the most of their academic journey which is often devoid of practice. They have limited to no exposure regarding the practical component of the theoretical knowledge gained by them. It shows limited exposure. Hence their expectations differ from reality. Exposure and experience can cause this to change. Extensive experience and multiple exposures can shorten the gap between expectation and reality (j to h). Greater exposure helps students in understanding reality and hence they are able to align their expectations with the reality. The impact of exposure and experience can further lead to proactivity (j to k). Students are likely to be proactive, clear and ambitious when they have gone through a variety of experiences that have likely widened their perspective and understanding.

Conclusion

It can be concluded based on the findings of the study that the concept of CGC is well-understood by students and university CSPs. The value and benefits of CGC are also duly acknowledged. However, the approach of students towards CGC is not promising. Students have innumerable reasons for consulting CGC but a majority of them are not ready to embrace CGC as well as they should. Some of them lack appropriate awareness; some students follow the decisions by elders; some are not keen on resolving their issues as it requires effort; some are bound by cultural taboos, and some have no clarity about their self and their career. This enhances their career concerns and leads to a series of troubles. Approaching CGC with an open mind is highly needed. Breaking through various cultural taboos, personal shackles and societal constraints could be helpful in this process.

Limitations and Future Research

This research explored the concepts of university CSPs regarding CGC. It did not consider those CSPs who are providing CGC via private organizations. Future research could explore their comprehension of CGC.

The approach of university students towards CGC was considered in this research. The approach of other groups like college students, school students, post-graduate students and professionals should also be investigated.

Implications

Planning and communication of CGC services should be improved in universities. Many career concerns could be suitably addressed by the current CGC services. Awareness and access to CGC ought to be widespread among university students. Appropriate utilization of CGC could lead to positive consequences for students and their societies.

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Annexure-A

Interview Protocol

- What do you understand by the term career guidance and counseling?
- How do students resolve their career related matters?
 - Which factors impact career related matters of students?
How?
- What other ways can be used to address career related needs of university students?
- Do you think career guidance and counseling services should be provided at university level?
 - What is its usefulness?
- Are career counselor or career professionals available at your university?
 - If yes, do you visit/consult them?
 - What career services are available at your university?

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